

Holiday Survival 101

Right about now, many of us are beginning to experience this unique season of the year. No doubt you may have already felt the need for more time, or at least a helper in the many tasks and demands we encounter.

There is much that we can do to help alleviate the stress, and prepare for the events that unfortunately all too often we may find ourselves facing. This article may not touch on all that may be happening in our lives, both and off the job, but it will address some of the more common concerns.

Shopping Safety

Many of us will venture out to the shopping centers, malls, outlets, and corner stores for gifts for those we hold dear. The spirit of giving, when mixed with the stress of crowded shops, and the need to get home and wrap presents before someone comes home, can make us oblivious to our personal safety. A few tips to help avoid an encounter with someone possessed with the spirit of taking, not giving:

- Try to carry cash, credit cards, checkbook, etc. on your person such as an inner pocket of your coat or jacket, not in a purse or wallet. When your hands are carrying bags of gifts, groceries, children, or a combination of all three, a purse slung over the shoulder and not clutched, or a bulging wallet in a hip pocket may make you an easy victim.
- In parking areas, try to park in well lighted areas where the most people are. Attempt to park by pulling through spots to save you from the need to back out.
- For the ladies, along with securing your purse on you, be aware not to park near large vehicles, blind corners, or the farthest reaches of the parking deck. Also be aware that certain individuals profile their likely victims as to who is by themselves, where they are parked, what they are driving, and how their hair is being worn (avoid ponytails, pigtails, long braids...these styles permit an attacker to gain a hold on you, inflicting pain, to gain control) and if they are distracted by other activities, such as being on the cell phone.

Vehicle Safety

As we prepare to go over the river, and through the woods in our Chevrolet (or Ford, Toyota, VW, etc.), we should inspect our vehicle to make sure it is up to the demands of winter. Be sure your lights and wipers are working properly, and that all fluids are topped off. Inspect your tires; if it is almost time for replacements, consider new tires for a gift to yourself. If you live in areas where snow tires/studded tires may be needed for winter, now may be a good time to change into them. Other items that may help are:

- Ensure that you have an ice scraper/snowbrush in your car if your area experiences heavy frost or snow in winter.
- Drive defensively.

- Those of us who may travel some distances to reach the home place for the season should prepare a kit to include snacks, water, games, and other items for comfort (and survival in some areas if you go through mountainous, or other remote areas).
- Allow yourself plenty of time for driving, whether you are planning to go down a couple of miles to shop, or across country. The more time we have given ourselves for travel equates into less stress for everyone.

Wellness

Stress can cause clouds to blot out the good times, and memories of the holidays. Along with giving ourselves more time for travel, and for shopping, we can do other things as well to help reduce the stress that all will experience:

- Set realistic expectations for the season. We may not be able to get all that we wish to accomplish during this time, but we can do what is more important and meaningful first, and then take care of other items.
- Anticipate some setbacks, and have an alternate course or plan available (such as grabbing a Hokey Pokey Elmo instead of Limbo Elmo, when they sell out).
- Lots of parties and dinners may mean overindulgence in traditionally high in fats or carbohydrates, and low in vitamin content foods. Abstinence is not necessary, but moderation is. Look for, and enjoy healthy food choices at parties.
- Alcohol consumption (if you imbibe) should be in moderation for most; abstinence is a must if you are driving.
- Set aside some private time for yourself, and your family members to allow you to recharge and regroup for the next scheduled/or suddenly happening event.
- Don't forget that light exercise workouts can go a long way to help work off stressors and tension. Additionally, some of the calories from all the goodies will be used as well.

Home Safety

Our homes are often the meeting places for others to gather, whether for just family or the neighborhood. The hustle and bustle may make us overlook or ignore some basic safety tips for the home (and office) that we should be mindful of;

- Never leave fireplaces, wood stoves, or candles unattended when in use.
- Live Christmas trees and greenery pose a fire hazard if they are dried out. Water them daily if possible, and replace them if necessary. Use only appropriate extension cords and wiring fixtures. Turn off the tree lights when it is time for bed, or you must leave.
- Many jurisdictions prohibit live trees and open flames (candles) in certain building occupancies. Additionally when placing a tree in office/business settings, do not place trees where they will block the fire exits and means of egress.
- Ladder safety; always follow basic precautions such as using the proper ladder, not over-reaching, and setting them up on level, stable surfaces.
- Many toys require adult supervision, and/or training for children to use safely.

Also many toys may have small, fragile parts that can easily break and be swallowed, which may cause a medical emergency. Consider this when buying gifts.

Food Safety

As we are at the tables at parties, buffets, or in the kitchen preparing items for a spread to entertain guests later, we must also keep in mind some basic safety tips:

- Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetable prior to preparation, especially green vegetables and salad fixings.
- Help avoid contamination of food items by keeping prep areas clean, and by washing your hands. Use paper towels for wiping/drying your hands or utensils, not cloth towels.
- If you are preparing poultry, please follow safe thawing practices. Dishes which use a lot of egg products should be kept refrigerated until ready for eating.
- If you use warming trays, you should check periodically that food temperatures are maintained at 140 degrees Fahrenheit, at a minimum. Perishable foods not consumed within two hours of being brought out should be not served.

By following these hints (many of them you may already have known, but just needed to be reminded of), your holidays this year, and memories of them should be happier.